DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 570 TM 860 486

AUTHOR Valdivieso, Rafael
TITLE Hispanics and Education Data.
SPONS AGENCY National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 19 Jul 85
NOTE 10p.; In: Invited Papers: Elementary/Secondary Education Data Redesign Project, October 1985; see TM 860 450.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Adult Education; *Data Collection; Economic Factors; Educational Attainment; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; *Hispanic Americans; *Language Handicaps; Poverty; Preschool Education; *Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS High School and Beyond (NCES); *National Center for Education Statistics

ABSTRACT

Although the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and other organizations have collected some data on Hispanics, there is a demand for further information on Hispanics at various levels. NCES will probably have to expand its data collection to the preschool level in order to account for the effect of societal factors on later schooling. Data on upper elementary to early high school is needed in order to study the relationship between language difficulty, low academic achievement, and dropout rates. A longitudinal study is needed that spans the upper elementary through high school years. Collecting information on young adults who are not high school graduates becomes more complicated as more adults immigrate into this country. The October Current Population Survey could be used to address questions at the adult level. Specific data or modifications are needed in the following areas: ethnic subgroups, nativity and recency of migration, language, gender, age, parent education, and "at risk" construct. It is important to maintain the High School and Beyond (HS&B) data base because of its value in assessing student performance, school effectiveness, and student changes over time. The oversampling of some Hispanic subgroups in HS&B is critical to making it the most useful national survey. (JAZ)

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HISPANICS AND EDUCATION DATA

Rafael Valdivieso

HISPANIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Prepared for the National Center for Education Statistics, July 19, 1985

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HISPANICS AND EDUCATION DATA

Since the late 1970's the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has produced some of the most useful and usable data about Hispanics from among a wide variety of governmental agencies. But that leadership edge is beginning to erode as other statistical agencies such as in the Department of Health and Human Services have come to realize their data gaps and are mounting serious data collection efforts about Hispanics. The momentum for these efforts were accelerated after the 1980 Census documented the growing number of Hispanics.

NCES's data efforts in regard to Hispanics have been in both illuminating specific problems such as language use and background as well as actively pursuing strategies to amplify the collection and dissemination of Hispanic data. Ironically, while we now know more about Hispanic high school students in general and about language use in specific, we still have not developed adequate data and models to explain how English language deficits or bilingualism interact with other factors to affect attainment and achievement. On the other hand, because of the NCES data, we can now identify a number of basic issues beyond the traditional concern of language.

But NCES cannot rest on its laurels and, in fact, will need to move aggressively to maintain its current assets and to anticipate new demands for data on Hispanics.

It will be another two decades before Hispanics actually outnumber blacks to become America's largest minority but, of course, in a number of cities and in some regions this is already a reality. More critical in regard to data needs is that Hispanics are replacing blacks as the group at the bottom of the education ladder in terms of both attainment and achievement. We know Hispanics drop out at greater numbers on the different levels of education but that Hispanics achieve about the same as blacks now is not as readily known. In comparisons of black and Hispanic achievement, the fact that larger numbers of poor achieving blacks are still in school, and therefore, lower their average scores is usually not considered.

EDUCATION LEVELS AND TRANSITIONS

Pre-School to Early Elementary

NCES will soon probably have to expand its data collection to the pre-school level (5,4 and 3 year-olds) in order to account for the effect on later schooling of the following (often, interrelated) societal factors:

(1) More women entering the work force while their children are young;

(2) The recent return of high levels of poverty among children, especially minority;

(3) Increase in female-headed households; and

(4) The push for early childhood education as a major policy response to these three factors.

What is the Hispanic situation for each of these factors and what are the implications of these factors for collecting data?

Although it is a recent change, Hispanic women (49%) are participating in the labor force at rates comparable to white women (49%) and black women (53%) (DeNavas and Fernandez, 1984).

Since 1979 the poverty rate among Hispanics has been climbing steadily. The poverty rate for Hispanics under 18 in 1983 was 38.2 percent, compared to 17.3 percent for Anglos (Pear, 1984). Furthermore, Hispanic children who live in female-headed families are more likely to live in poverty than either white or black children in the same situation. The respective figures are 70.5 percent, 47.6 percent, and 68.5 percent. More black children, however, live in female-headed households although even that dubious distinction has almost been matched by one Hispanic sub-group: Puerto Ricans.

In 1982 about 45 percent of all Puerto Rican families were maintained by a woman with no husband present, compared to an average for non-Hispanic families of 15 percent. Put another way, 55 percent of all Puerto Rican children live in single-parent households (Bould, 1985). About a third of the Puerto Rican families had one worker and other third had no workers. Given this set of circumstances, one can readily understand why 42 percent of all Puerto Rican families live in poverty.

Overall, in 1983, 23% of Hispanic families were maintained by women (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1984) and the median money income in 1982 for such women was $7,436 to $7,458 and $13,496 for black and white women, respectively. (DeNavas and Fernandez).

Probably, the single best background correlate to a child's education achievement has been the mother's education. The low education attainment of Hispanic women, especially those in poverty, complicates the pre-school situation for their children. Among Hispanic families headed by a female under 45 years of age with only children under 6 years, 64% had less than a high school education in 1984, or put another way, 28% had only an elementary school education. The comparable figures for less than high school education among white and black females are, respectively, 26% and 25%. (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1985a, Table 8).

What is it like to be raised in a poor family headed by one adult? In the past, poor children entered school at a disadvantage because of less-developed verbal competence than a child coming from a middle-class family. What further deficits will the children from one adult homes have if they have even less exposure to adult speech (as limited as it may be). In the case of Hispanics, we have a further complication in that Hispanic children often come to school speaking mainly Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English.

The larger policy question to address is whether we are going to have, as Bud Hodgkinson has said, more "damaged goods" on arrival at the doorsteps of our elementary schools that we have had in the recent past. Or, should we be trying

other policy approaches to prevent or reduce this likelihood. Policy makers will not be able to decide without adequate data.

Because of these grim statistics and the knowledge that pre-school programs have had quite positive long-term effects with disadvantaged children, pre-school programs and kindergarten for these children should be widely adopted. Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs for children from low income families are seen as a way to get these children ready for school as well as to identify and correct a whole series of handicapping conditions early before they are compounded in elementary school and later life. Some of the handicapping conditions and the neglect of these conditions are directly related to poverty and poor health care for the mother and child.

Yet, Hispanics did not participate as heavily as other groups during the late 1960's and 1970s in federal programs such as Head Start. Even today, while 37.6 percent of white and 36.3 of black 3 and 4 year-olds are in preschool programs, only 23.5 percent of Hispanic 3 and 4 year-olds are in similar programs (U.S. Department of Commerce,1984). We do not know why this is the case, except that Hispanic families may prefer not to entrust the care of young children to persons who are not relatives. The Current Population Survey could ask why a child is not enrolled at the appropriate level of schooling. The question would yield useful information on dropouts at the other age levels. We will return to this question in the next section.

As for NCES collecting data at the pre-school level, I am not familiar enough with data collection methodologies at this level to offer advice, except that a longitudinal survey, with interviews of teachers and parents, to cover the transitions from pre-kindergarten to the early elementary school years should be considered.

Upper Elementary to Early High School

Excluding the elementary school years, Hispanics are less in school, including the pre-school level, than either black or white. The Hispanic attrition rate is higher than either at every level after elementary school. We know Hispanics are often retained a grade in elementary school. We also know that tracking becomes more prominent from the upper elementary school years on.

One might well ask at this point: how does the problem of language fit into this situation? Isn't the problem of limited proficiency in English the main cause of low academic achievement and dropping-out for Hispanics? A few comments on this topic are in order. Yes, langauge does play a part, but the situation is more complex than would seem apparent. By the time Hispanics reach the ninth or tenth grade, their language difficulties in earlier years may have caused them to be retained a year or two in earlier grades. Almost 25 percent of all Hispanics enter high school overage (Brown, Rosen, Hill and Olivas, 1980). Hence, they are behind their age contemporaries in school and ahead of their grade peers in physical and emotional development. Combined with other factors as poor grades and attraction to work, being overage frequently results in students dropping out of school.

Yet, because the complexity of this situation is not usually captured in surveys of drop-outs, the language factor does not loom as large in the survey results. More data and research is needed to tease out the factors and their interrelations in this situation.

As useful as the High School and Beyond data has been for studying dropping-out between the sophomore and senior years, it can't provide us with the data we need to study the interrelation mentioned because High School and Beyond does not contain, of course, any data on those students who dropped out before the spring semester of the tenth grade. As mentioned above, many Hispanics are behind their age peers in school and reach age 16 before they get to the tenth grade. According to a report prepared for NCES by Hirano-Nakanishi (1983), about 40 percent of all Hispanic students who leave school would do so before reaching their sophomore year.

Just as High School and Beyond spans the important transition from high school to post-secondary education and the world of work, we need a longitudinal survey that spans from the upper elementary through junior high school years to high school, i.e., 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th grades.

Adult Education

Forty percent of Hispanic 20 to 24 year-olds are not high school graduates and the comparable Puerto Rican figure is 46 percent (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1985). We can also assume that some of these young adults are already married and have children, and for many others, this will soon be the case. It is important to know what these individuals plan to do about completing high school or obtaining a G.E.D.

What complicates the out-of-school/non-graduate statistic for young Hispanic adults is that it includes young Hispanics who have recently immigrated into this country and are not high school graduates. We are not at all sure about an estimate for this group. In any case, the larger the number of young Hispanic adults who have recently arrived in this county without a high school diploma, the more it is an issue for public policy.

While it would be difficult for NCES to directly address these issues through its own data collection efforts, the October Current Population Survey is a good alternative. As mentioned in the pre-school section, I think a question or two could be included that would ask: If you or children in your household are not enrolled in school at the appropriate level, why are you and/or they not?, and do you/they plan to continue your education.

Even the growing phenomenon of individuals "stopping-out" (or temporarily stopping their education with intentions to return) at the post-secondary level, and increasingly at the secondary level, can be addressed through these questions. These questions would yield valuable information for higher education planning.

Another alternative for collecting these data would be the adult sample of NAEP.

SPECIFIC DATA NEEDS OR MODIFICATIONS

The following comments on classificatory variables and levels, especially those more pertinent to Hispanic than other groups, are offered as short advisories that also contain suggestions for modifications or continued use of the variables or levels.

Ethnic Sub-Groups. While Hispanics of the various groups are beginning to coalesce on some issues, the socioeconomic and education characteristics of the different groups are as diverse as ever and are beginning to diverge even more so from each other. The residual category of Other Hispanics is now the second largest group of Hispanics and has become a hodgepodge of the various, most recent Hispanics to the country with the oldest Hispanics in the country, the Hispanos in the southwest. I mentioned this only as an alert as I think the Census Bureau will need to do something about this category before other agencies can make any changes.

Nativity and recency of migration. While a large majority of Hispanic students, and even their parents, are born and raised in this country, continuing immigration still makes these important variables to maintain. In fact, if political violence continues in Central America, and possibly escalate in Mexico because of its economic and political dislocations, then we will see even greater waves of adolescents and young adult immigrants to this country. Right now we are experiencing a surge of new Salvadoran adolescent male immigrants because the draft age in El Salvador has been lowered to 12. Many of these youngsters have not had any schooling in their country.

Language. Since the mid-seventies we have developed ways to identify language minority students and have learned more about their problems in school. We have moved towards core definitions of both language minority target groups and the services they receive.

While we have a considerable amount of self-reported data from national data bases as the 1980 Census and the High School and Beyond, etc., a short assessment of reading proficiency in both English and, possibly, Spanish, would give us a better grasp of the salient features in the self-reported assessments. In general, the combination of these and other activities will allow for cross-walking" and comparative analyses with other data bases. In this sense, the proposed assessments would further enhance the federal investment that has already been made in this area. The proposed assessments are the next stage in a logical progression or expansion of inquiry in to the education of language minority students.

I understand ETS proposed to add these assessments and an expansion of the language minority construct to the NAEP data base, but I do not know the outcome of this proposal. Such data and analyses would move us closer to understanding the interrelationships between language difficulties, school policies and practices, school age delay and dropping-out. Because of the extraordinary high drop-out rates among language-minority Hispanics, research in this area is a critical research priority.

Gender. While white and black gender differences are moderating, Hispanic gender differences are still quite sharp.

Age. Age has already been mentioned in regard to its importance in studying Hispanics who are over-age for their grade placements.

Parent education. NCES used "Less than High School" as its first category on parent education in HS&B and other surveys. This is not adequate for Hispanics and their low education attainment. The first category reported should be "6th grade or less," or possibly, "8th grade or less." For Hispanics, 25 to 34 years old, 26.4 percent had completed less than 9th grade in 1982 (U.S. Department of Education, 1984).

"At-risk" construct. NCES should consider developing a construct for at-risk students, using below-average grades and achievement scores in the first quartile and perhaps some other conditions.

The construct would be helpful for addressing a variety of policy concerns which will arise as we enter the second stage of the current reform movement.

NCES Data Sets to Keep or Delete

From my perspective, High School and Beyond is the most important to maintain because of its indisputable value in assessing student performance, school effectiveness and student changes over time.

I can see the value of the other NCES data bases but I am not nearly as familiar with them as I am with HS&B.

The Common Core of Data is an important collection as well as concept. In spite of the great difficulties involved, more should be done to obtain the use of common definitions among the States for dropping out and other student outcomes. Likewise, more effort should be given to collecting data by racial/Hispanic indicators even though substantial political problems may be involved. This same comment applies to most NCES census and sample surveys, including the needed private school survey. About 10% of the Hispanic student population is in private schools.

In view of similar information that could be collected for items like vocational education facilities and equipment or scientific equipment and materials, why is information on library/media centers collected? Is this survey necessary?

Other Comments and Recommendations

Census Data by School Districts

To my knowledge, not much use, at least by most people outside the government is being made of census data organized by school district. Perhaps this is already the case, but if it is not, an NCES program officer should be assigned the task

of working with the Census Bureau to make data organized by school districts better known and accessible to policy analysts and researchers in education. The program officer should also be involved in assembling as well as devising solutions to technical problems in using these data.

Multiple Sources of Survey Data

A major strength of the HS&B study is the confluence or triangulation of data obtained through different methods or sources. This approach should be praised and continued in future surveys. In this regard, an expanded parent or home interview for HS&B would have been useful and should definitely be pursued in future surveys.

Oversampling

The oversampling of some Hispanic subgroups in HS&B was critical to making this survey the most useful national survey ever. Again, this approach should be continued in future surveys.

Dissemination of Data About Hispanics

NCES has not kept pace with its previous achievements in this area. The publication of the Condition of Hispanic Education by NCES in 1980 was widely recognized and applauded in the Hispanic community. In view of the new data collected and the pressing needs for this information, an updated edition of this publication should be on NCES's agenda for the coming year.

NCES should also consider preparing and releasing for the use of analysts and researchers an index of NCES reports and bulletins, contractors reports, and tabulations that include Hispanic indicators or categories.

In regard to developing and presenting tabulations by race and ethnicity, the collapsing of Hispanics with other groups should be avoided if at all possible. For example, as insightful as a recent NCES report, An Analysis of Course-Taking Patterns in Secondary Schools as Related to Student Characteristics, was for the study of course-taking, it was marred, because it collapsed Hispanic with Others.

The State Education Statistics wall chart is quite handy, especially the challenge goals, but it should include percentages of single parent households and limited-English-proficient children under population characteristics.

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